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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.**

**2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War: a Fight of Operational Synchronization**

**by**

**James R. Vance**

**Major, U.S. Army**

**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Over the course of 34 days in July 2006, the Shi'a-Muslim, paramilitary force of Hezbollah fought the Israel Defense Force (IDF) to a standstill and delivered the first “Arab Victory” over the IDF. Hezbollah—armed, advised, and funded by Iran and Syria—synchronized efforts of conventional and irregular forces employing nation-state capabilities and denied Israel its objectives. The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) failed to achieve its objectives during the 2006 war with Hezbollah due to ineffective operational synchronization relative to its adversary. The conditions and circumstances of the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war make its study valuable for operational level planners and commanders as it demonstrates the complex problem of state-supported hybrid threats. This state-support enables the proliferation of high-end capabilities like armed drones, advanced anti-tank and anti-ship missiles, and sophisticated protection systems. To meet the unique challenges posed by increasingly capable hybrid-threats, operational planners and commanders must focus on synchronization of “multiple punches” from the right mix of domains and functions to achieve victory.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the course of 34 days in July 2006, the Shi'a-Muslim, paramilitary force of Hezbollah fought the Israel Defense Force (IDF) to a standstill and delivered the first “Arab Victory” over the IDF. Hezbollah pitted fewer than 5,000 fighters against the IDF’s combined arms of air and ground forces (30,000).<sup>1</sup> Hezbollah inflicted more Israeli casualties per Arab fighters than did any of Israel’s state opponents in the 1956, 1967, 1973, or 1982 Arab-Israeli interstate wars.<sup>2</sup> Hezbollah—armed, advised, and funded by Iran and Syria—synchronized efforts of conventional and irregular forces employing nation-state capabilities and denied Israel its objectives. Much like Sparta’s watershed defeats at Pylos and Sphacteria in 425 B.C., the failure of the IDF generated much introspection within Israel. Furthermore, and perhaps more ominously, Hezbollah’s victory emboldened the rhetoric and actions of Israel’s hostile neighbors. In the months following the United Nations-brokered ceasefire, the IDF Chief of Staff and the Minister of Defense resigned, and the Prime Minister chose not to seek re-election. The state-sponsored hybrid threat the IDF faced, and certain doctrinal similarities between the IDF and the U.S military make the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war an illuminating study for operational level planners and commanders thinking about future conflict.<sup>3</sup>

The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) failed to achieve its objectives during the 2006 war with Hezbollah due to ineffective operational synchronization relative to its adversary.<sup>4</sup> First, the

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Air Operations in Israel’s War against Hezbollah* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2011), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Biddle and Jeffrey A. Friedman, *The 2006 Lebanon Campaign and the Future of Warfare* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), XV.

<sup>3</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, “Hybrid Warfare and Challenges,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, no.52 (1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009), 36.

<sup>4</sup> Operational synchronization is both a process—arranging or initiating actions in terms of space, time, and purpose—and effect in generating maximum relative (combat or noncombat) power at a decisive place and time. It should ensure that all elements of force collectively generate effects that exceed the sum of their individual effects. A soundly conceived and well-executed synchronization plan may allow an inferior force to defeat a superior enemy force. (Milan N. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Newport: U.S. Naval War College, 2009), IX-145.

IDF turned away from its historical use of combined arms, fire and maneuver concepts and tried to achieve its objectives with a bold fire and minimal maneuver concept that was not mutually supportive. Hezbollah adroitly synchronized a mutually supporting fire and maneuver concept that was capable of delivering effects across the levels of war. Second, while the IDF initially synchronized operational intelligence and operational fires, as the war continued beyond its first few days, operational fires tempo outstripped intelligence to disastrous effect. In contrast, Hezbollah integrated intelligence and fires, lethal and non-lethal, achieving effects across the levels of war and right up until the cease-fire. Third, Israel struggled to synchronize operational protection across its other functions. As a result, the IDF failed to defeat the Hezbollah rocket attacks into Israel and lost sailors to a missile attack. Conversely, Hezbollah used the six years between the IDF withdrawal from southern Lebanon to develop an extensive network of bunkers and was able to achieve asymmetric protection effects through the use of media. Finally, while the IDF struggled to sustain its air and ground efforts and lost campaign momentum, Hezbollah's extensive use of sustainment caches to support its fires and maneuver assets allowed it to maintain its effort throughout the war in the face of IDF air strikes.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 1982, Israel occupied southern Lebanon to destroy the Palestinian Liberation Organization using the area as a base of operations to conduct raids into Israel and terror attacks across the region. Israel remained in Southern Lebanon until 2000 when it abruptly

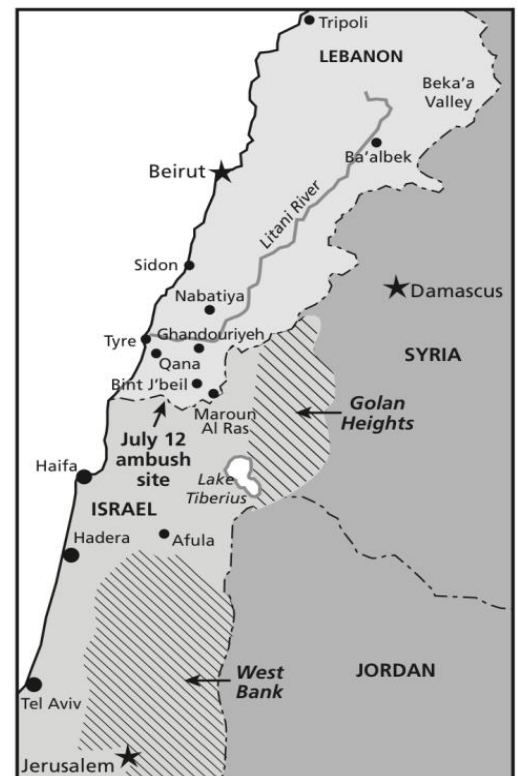
began a unilateral withdrawal fulfilling a major campaign promise by the newly elected Israeli Prime Minister—Ehud Barak.<sup>5</sup>

Hezbollah, a Lebanese Shi'a-Muslim political party and paramilitary group, formed in response to the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon. The sympathetic Shi'a governments of Iran and Syria supported the group, and its influence grew with its capabilities. While initially a militia, it expanded its role in Lebanon and became a political party winning seats in the 1992 parliamentary elections representing the Shi'a minority of Lebanon. It capitalized on the Israeli withdrawal in 2000 claiming it had driven Israel from Lebanon.<sup>6</sup>

Over the next five years, the second intifada erupted in Israel and the occupied territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. During this period, Hezbollah conducted multiple cross-border attacks killing and kidnapping IDF personnel and conducting rocket attacks on IDF positions. While Israel retained a security force along the Israeli-Lebanese border, its focus and main effort were counter-insurgency operations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In the early morning hours of 12 July 2006, two dozen Hezbollah operatives executed a cross-border raid and ambushed an IDF patrol killing eight and abducting two IDF soldiers near Zar'it (Figure 1). Hezbollah executed

**Fig. 1: Area of Operations**



Source: Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Air Operations in Israel's War against Hezbollah* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2011), 16.

<sup>5</sup> Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, *34 Days: Israel, Hezbollah, and the War in Lebanon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), Kindle edition, loc. 430 of 5530.

<sup>6</sup> Eyal Zisser, "Hizballah in Lebanon: Between Tehran and Beirut, Between the Struggle with Israel, and the Struggle for Lebanon," in *Lebanon: Liberation, Conflict, and Crisis*, ed. Barry Rubin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 160.



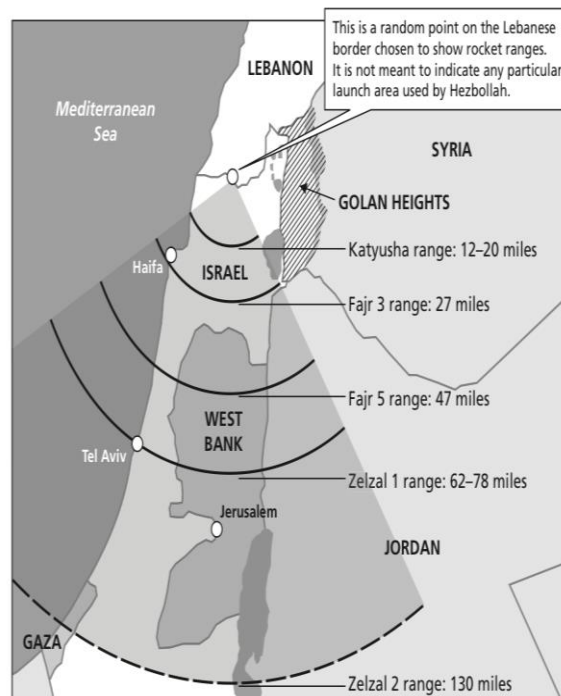
the attack in conjunction with a rocket attack on IDF positions along the border to cover the ambush and the withdrawal of the raid force. Once the IDF realized the two soldiers were missing, they executed a planned immediate action that included a platoon-sized attack across the border and IAF bombing of the four bridges over the Litani River.<sup>7</sup> The following day the war began with a massive IDF response.

## OBJECTIVES

Hezbollah's strategic objectives were the release of Lebanese prisoners languishing in Israeli jails, the return of "Lebanese land" (the Sha'aba Farms), to support the Palestinian intifada, and to remain a deterrent to a U.S. or Israeli attack on Iran.<sup>8</sup> Its operational objectives were to attrite the will of Israel's home front and to retain Southern Lebanon.<sup>9</sup>

Israeli's strategic objectives were the return of the two captured IDF soldiers, a complete cease-fire, the deployment of the Lebanese army into all of Southern Lebanon, expulsion of Hezbollah from the area, and fulfillment of United Nations (UN) Resolution 1559.<sup>10</sup> Its unstated strategic objective was the desire to renew Israel's

**Fig. 2: Hezbollah's Rocket Coverage of Israel**



Source: Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Air Operations in Israel's War against Hezbollah* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2011), 18.

<sup>7</sup> Matt M. Matthews, *We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War*, The Long War Series (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute (CSI), 2008), 33.

<sup>8</sup> Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, *34 Days: Israel, Hezbollah, and the War in Lebanon*, loc. 907 of 5530.

<sup>9</sup> Amir Kulick, "Hizbollah vs. the IDF: The Operational Dimension," *Strategic Assessment* vol.9, no.3 (2006): 30.

level of deterrence in the region that many believed eroded when Israel withdrew from Southern Lebanon and the Gaza Strip.<sup>11</sup> Its operational objectives included establishing an air and maritime blockade of Lebanon and destruction of Hezbollah's rocket network (Figure 2).

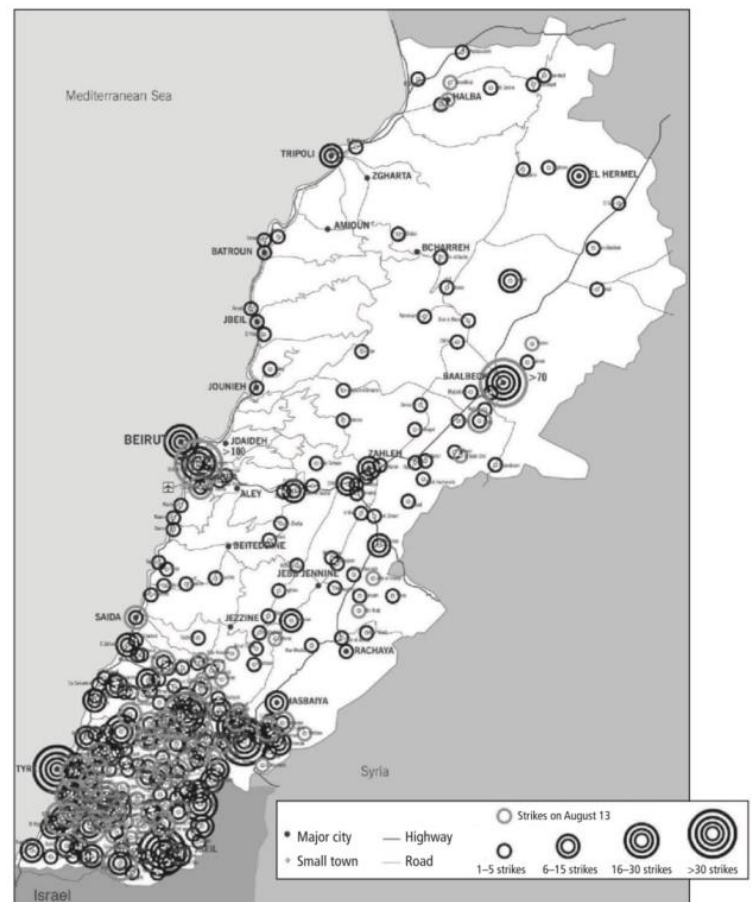
While not planned as a deliberate campaign, the war unfolded in three distinct phases. The IDF conducted the first phase from 13 to 31 July. This phase involved a major air operation with limited special operations and conventional force raids into Southern Lebanon of brigade strength or less. This phase

began when the IAF executed Operation SPECIFIC GRAVITY, destroying more than 50 of Hezbollah's long-range rockets in a pre-planned, 34-minute strike.<sup>12</sup> Other targets included

Hezbollah observation posts along the border, Hezbollah compounds in the Shi'a section of Beirut, and roads and bridges Israel believed Hezbollah might use to evacuate the abducted soldiers.

Over the course of the war, but primarily in this phase, the IAF flew 10,000 strike missions, primarily directed at the Shite district of Beirut, the Beqaa Valley near

**Fig. 3: Locations of IAF Air Strikes**



Source: Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Air Operations in Israel's War against Hezbollah* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2011), 91.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004): Calls upon all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon; Calls for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias; Supports the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory.

<sup>11</sup> Ozlem Tur, "The Lebanese War of 2006: Reasons and Consequences," *Perceptions* (Spring 2006): 109.

<sup>12</sup> William M. Arvin, *Diving Victory: Airpower in the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War* (Maxwell AFB: Air University Press, 2007), 170-171.

the Syrian border, and the region south of the Litani River (Figure 3).<sup>13</sup> Despite losing many of its long-range launchers early in the war, Hezbollah responded with a steady stream of rocket fire into Israel. In total, Hezbollah fired an estimated 4,000 rockets, the vast majority of which were 122mm Katyushas stationed within 20km of the Israeli border.<sup>14</sup> Hezbollah fired an average of more than 100 rockets per day into Israel, including 220 on the final day of the war. In all, about 900 of these rockets landed in urban areas, causing 53 civilian deaths.<sup>15</sup>

The second phase of the war ran from 31 July to 11 August when the IDF launched Operation CHANGE OF DIRECTION 8, a major ground operation executed by eight IDF ground brigades and was designed to take and hold a “security zone” several kilometers wide along the entire border.<sup>16</sup> During this period, Hezbollah continued to conduct rocket attacks into Northern Israel, fought the IDF from prepared positions, and utilized advanced weaponry to attrite IDF forces.

On August 11, the IDF launched the final phase of the campaign, Operation CHANGE OF DIRECTION 11. This second major ground operation was described as a “push to the Litani” and involved five ground divisions (Figure 4). As one of the armored brigades moved toward its objective through the Saluqi Valley on August 12, Hezbollah fighters ambushed the column with anti-tank guided missile fire penetrating 11 Merkava main battle tanks and killing 12 soldiers.<sup>17</sup> On August 14, Israel and Hezbollah implemented a UN Security Council ceasefire.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 62-74.

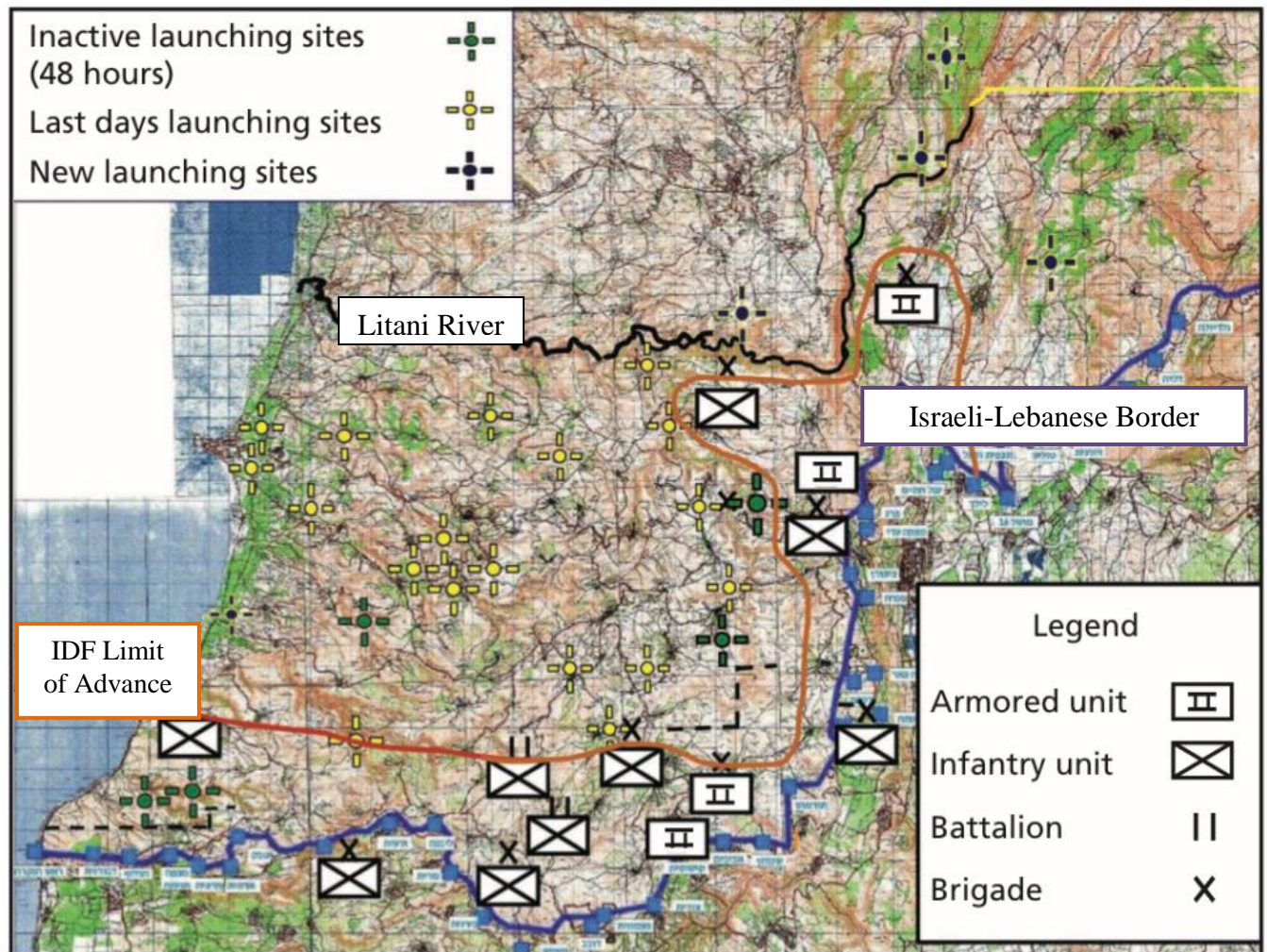
<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 55-56, 59.

<sup>15</sup> Uzi Rubin, “Hezbollah’s Rocket Campaign against Northern Israel: A Preliminary Report,” *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, vol. 6 no. 10 (2006): 10-15.

<sup>16</sup> Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, *34 Days: Israel, Hezbollah, and the War in Lebanon*, loc 3040-3062 of 5530.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., loc 3802-4085 of 5530.

Fig. 4: IDF Positions and Hezbollah Rocket-Launching Sites at Cease Fire



Source: David E. Johnson, *Hard Fighting: Israel in Lebanon and Gaza* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2011), 77.

By this time, the IDF had taken up ground positions in more than two dozen Lebanese towns, though a significant portion of the ground below the Litani had seen almost no IDF ground presence during the campaign (Figure 4). “In 34 days of fighting, the IDF had sustained 119 combat fatalities; Hezbollah had lost an estimated 650 to 750 fighters.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Biddle and Jeffrey A. Friedman, *The 2006 Lebanon Campaign and the Future of Warfare*, 33.

## OPERATIONAL FIRES AND OPERATIONAL MANEUVER SYNCHRONIZATION

Speaking to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division in July 1941, MG George S. Patton said:

There is still a tendency in each separate unit to be a one-handed puncher.

By that, I mean the rifleman wants to shoot, the tanker to charge, the artilleryman to fire. That is not the way to win in battle. To get harmony in battle; each weapon must support the others. Team play wins. You musicians of Mars must come into the concert at the proper place and at the proper time.<sup>19</sup>

While General Patton was addressing the tactical level of war, his idea is germane at the operational level as well. The IDF's campaign in 2006 exemplifies operational level "one-handed punching"; first seeking victory through air power and then on the ground. This method of force employment applied a tremendous amount of combat power upon Lebanon and Hezbollah, but failed to mass force at the proper place and time to accomplish its objectives.

Following the IDF withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in 2000, Hezbollah began preparing for the next war with Israel. Hezbollah saw another war as inevitable and believed Israeli societal mettle had weakened, and became casualty adverse.<sup>20</sup> With this casualty aversion and an increasing reliance on technology, Hezbollah leaders assumed the IDF would want to fight the next war primarily from the air. Hezbollah envisioned achieving victory by surviving the air attack, eroding Israeli will with its rocket arsenal, and goading the IDF into a ground war, they did not want.<sup>21</sup> The logic continued that as casualties and frustrations

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<sup>19</sup> U.S. Army. *Musicians of Mars II: Center for Army Lessons Learned Handbook 16-12* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, 2016), iii.

<sup>20</sup> Amir Kulick, "Hezbollah vs. the IDF: The Operational Dimension," 31-32.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 31-32.

mounted, Israeli leaders would succumb to political pressure and end the war.<sup>22</sup> With this theory of victory in mind, Hezbollah went to work hardening and dispersing its operational and strategic fires assets. Then they developed an elaborate network of engagement areas in Southern Lebanon from strong points and at key choke points, the IDF would need to maneuver through for any ground campaign. Hezbollah covered these engagement areas with advanced anti-tank guided missiles, mines, and artillery.<sup>23</sup> They protected these assets in sophisticated tunnels and bunkers. This design facilitated synchronization of operational fires and maneuver in a mutually supporting operational construct.

In Israel, the people and politicians were more casualty-adverse; however, the belief that the IDF could deliver victory from the air—stoked by incomplete observations of the wars in Kosovo and Iraq—had the greatest influence on operational planning and conduct of the war. This belief was so strong the IDF Chief of Staff General Dan Halutz, the effective IDF joint force commander of the war, declared the idea of major ground combat as “anachronistic.”<sup>24</sup> He believed the IDF could target its way to victory through high volume use of precision munitions “bomb[ing] Hezbollah back 20 years” and pressuring the Lebanese to submit to Israel’s demands.<sup>25</sup>

While the IDF had success early on destroying many of the medium and some of the long-range rockets, it never stopped the daily barrage of hundreds of short-range Katyusha rockets into Israel. Even after dropping more than 2500 precision-guided munitions in the first three

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>24</sup> Sarah E. Kreps, “The 2006 Lebanon War: Lessons Learned,” *Parameters* (Spring 2007): 76.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 76.



days of the war, only 7% of Hezbollah's warfighting capability had been affected despite the massive destruction across Lebanon.<sup>26</sup>

In the second phase of the war, the IDF conducted its first major ground operation with eight brigades attacking to secure a buffer zone 10-15 km into Southern Lebanon.<sup>27</sup> Its shallow design and piecemeal execution precluded maneuver in depth and allowed Hezbollah to fight from complex terrain and maintain favorable force ratios. Furthermore, the operational task organization and timing precluded air-to-ground integration during this phase. As a result, Israeli main battle tanks were out-ranged by Hezbollah's advanced anti-tank guided missiles and the lack of air-to-ground integration prevented the IDF from destroying Hezbollah targets of opportunity as they reinforced and deployed to meet the IDF on the ground.

During the final phase of the war, with only hours until the ceasefire took effect, the IDF began a five-division attack to isolate and clear Southern Lebanon.<sup>28</sup> While the ground force succeeded in isolating the region, the IDF lost 11 main battle tanks, and the ceasefire took effect before they had cleared the area.<sup>29</sup> This maneuver, deep into Southern Lebanon, still lacked air-to-ground integration as close air support had been removed from the IAF's set of core missions and liaison officers had been removed from IDF ground brigades.<sup>30</sup>

The IDF executed a major air operation, followed by two major ground operations. IDF headquarters in Tel Aviv planned and controlled air operations throughout the war while the IDF Northern Command planned and controlled ground operations 165km away in Safed. This command and control construct meant little synergy developed between these major

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<sup>26</sup> Matt M. Matthews, "Hard Lessons Learned," in *Back to Basics: A Study of the Second Lebanon War and Operation CAST LEAD*, ed. Scott Farquhar (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute (CSI) Press, 2009), 14.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Biddle and Jeffrey A. Friedman, *The 2006 Lebanon Campaign and the Future of Warfare*, 32.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>30</sup> Matt M. Matthews, "Hard Lessons Learned," 11.

operations. The timing, location, and design of the major operations had the effect of delivering three “one-handed punches.”

## **OPERATIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND FIRES SYNCHRONIZATION**

Over the course of the conflict, Hezbollah more effectively synchronized operational intelligence and operational lethal and non-lethal fires. Initially, the IDF integrated intelligence and fires with resounding success. In the opening days of the war, the IAF and Israeli Navy (IN) struck more than 94 targets and effectively destroyed the Hezbollah medium and long-range rocket threat.<sup>31</sup> This massive fires effort was enabled by an equally impressive operational intelligence effort accomplished in the months before the war. As the war continued, fires outpaced intelligence. To maintain pressure on Hezbollah, the IDF began using less reliable, but easier to generate intelligence like latent points of origin for Hezbollah rocket attacks as a means of generating targets. Striking one of these targets in Qana, the IDF destroyed an apartment building killing 28 civilians, including 17 children.<sup>32</sup> Hezbollah leveraged the event to great effect. Following this air strike and others, the IDF made little effort to explain the purpose of the strike or to release footage of what they had been targeting. Therefore, the only images that appeared were those showing massive rubble of built up areas, schools, hospitals, and places of worship. Hezbollah-controlled al-Manor TV, and other media outlets whose reporters were escorted by Hezbollah representatives broadcast wrenching images of killed and wounded civilians.<sup>33</sup> The Hezbollah handlers took reporters to the most horrific, and in many cases staged, scenes of destruction.<sup>34</sup> These images reinforced the Hezbollah narrative that Israel was disproportionately using force

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<sup>31</sup> Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Air Operations in Israel's War against Hezbollah*, 30.

<sup>32</sup> Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, *34 Days: Israel, Hezbollah, and the War in Lebanon*, loc. 2865 of 5530.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 2865 of 5530.

<sup>34</sup> Marvin Kalb and Carol Saivetz, “The Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006: The Media as a Weapon in Asymmetrical Conflict,” *Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy* (February 2007): 20.



against Lebanon. Hezbollah's control of the media was so great Marvin Kalb and Carol Saivetz, who studied media coverage after the war, wrote, "Throughout the conflict, the rarest picture of all was that of a Hezbollah guerilla."<sup>35</sup>

While the IDF lacked a clear and consistent strategic narrative, Hezbollah reinforced theirs across traditional media platforms and emerging social media vehicles. While Hezbollah lacked traditional intelligence capabilities, it leveraged news reporting as a means to fill this gap.<sup>36</sup> Hezbollah militia operating rocket batteries could launch rockets into Israel then go home and watch CNN to see where they landed and what they damaged.<sup>37</sup> The IDF's inability or unwillingness to restrict the media resulted in significant operational security lapses of which Hezbollah took advantage. Reporters deployed along the border would tip off Hezbollah by reporting on IDF movements. The UN mission in Southern Lebanon, charged with monitoring military activity in Southern Lebanon, also posted observations of IDF maneuvers online, cueing Hezbollah. While Hezbollah closely handled the media it allowed to operate in Lebanon, the IDF was plagued with soldiers and leaders talking to the media openly questioning the ongoing operations and revealing information regarding planned or on-going operations.

While the IDF shared little directly with the media about planned or executed air strikes, Hezbollah flooded the media space adroitly. For example, Hassan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah secretary general, went on air following an extensive air bombardment of the predominately-Shi'a district of Beirut, the Hezbollah Headquarters building, and Nasrallah's home and declared a reprisal. Live on al-Manar television and Israeli TV, Nasrallah asked the people of Beirut to look to the west. He then said, "The vessel that bombed Beirut will now be

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>37</sup> Matt M. Matthews, *We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War*, The Long War Series (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute (CSI), 2008), 33.

demolished.” Moments later, a C-802 anti-ship cruise missile slammed into the Israeli missile boat Hanit, one of the Israeli Navy’s most advanced vessels, killing four sailors.<sup>38</sup> Hezbollah timed the statement and the attack to occur during the Israeli Prime Minister’s scheduled televised address to the people of Israel about the progress of the war. An Arab journalist living in Beirut during the war recalled going to the coast that evening and observed:

This was the turning point in Lebanese public opinion. We saw flames on the sea and realized like everyone else that he [Nasrallah] had spoken the truth, not like other Arab leaders who tended to vaunt capabilities that they didn’t have. Nasrallah kept his word. The targeting of the Israeli missile boat strengthened popular support of Hezbollah. In the following days, you sensed Lebanese solidarity: Sunnis hosted Shiite refugees; even Christians in wealthy neighborhoods treated Shiites cordially. Suddenly there was a feeling of national pride in Hezbollah, which had stood up to Israel and bloodied her.<sup>39</sup>

As David Kilcullen and other counterinsurgency experts have commented, half of the fight in the information age is the information fight. Hezbollah understood this and outmaneuvered the IDF in this space. On the verge of capitulating on several occasions, Hezbollah was able to multiply the effect of their fires and IDF fires miscues with the responsive use of media and a coherent narrative.

## **OPERATIONAL PROTECTION SYNCHRONIZATION**

Hezbollah more effectively synchronized its protection efforts across its other operational functions. In the years leading up to the war, Hezbollah assessed that Israel would rely

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<sup>38</sup> Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, *34 Days: Israel, Hezbollah, and the War in Lebanon*, loc 1835 of 5530.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 1833 of 5530.

heavily on air strikes in future conflicts. As a result, they undertook a massive effort to build a series of bunkers and tunnels to protect their centers of gravity and mitigate the effectiveness of Israeli fires. Hezbollah leveraged Iranian and North Korean military experts to inform their design and construction of a sophisticated bunker and tunnel network.<sup>40</sup> During construction periods, Hezbollah conducted deception operations by overtly building decoy bunkers to draw attention from the actual bunker network. Additionally, they turned Israeli informants and had them provide false locations of bunkers to Israel.

While Hezbollah had limited traditional air defense capability, it did achieve air defense effects asymmetrically through active engagement activities guiding media to sites destroyed by the IAF and highlighting civilian casualties. Hezbollah “media handlers” would direct the media to the worst sites. In some cases to sites manipulated to exaggerate the loss of life or where staged recovery operations waiting for cues from handlers to bring the remains of women and children out of the rubble.<sup>41</sup> On cue, these teams would load casualties into waiting ambulances all to provide a compelling story for the media once on site. This asymmetric approach ultimately gained Hezbollah a 48-hour reprieve from air strikes due to international pressure on Israel following the Qana strike. In contrast to Hezbollah’s efforts, the IDF struggled to synchronize its protection efforts.

Israel was unable to stop the rocket barrages into Israel. The sheer numbers of rockets Hezbollah fired and the dispersed number of locations presented a tough challenge for the IDF tactically. Technically the high angle trajectory of the short-range Katyushas presented a technical challenge to IDF missile defense systems. Furthermore, due to surprise or lack of

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<sup>40</sup> Matt M. Matthews, “Hard Lessons Learned,” 8-9.

<sup>41</sup> Marvin Kalb and Carol Saivetz, “The Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006: The Media as a Weapon in Asymmetrical Conflict,” 17-18.

training, the IDF was unable to prevent the C-802 missile strike on the INS Hanit positioned off the coast of Lebanon.

## **OPERATIONAL SUSTAINMENT SYNCHRONIZATION**

Hezbollah knew sustaining its forces during a conflict would be difficult in the face of major IAF operations. Therefore, Hezbollah positioned large amounts of food, water, fuel, ammunition, weapons, and communications equipment forward in the bunker network. This effort enabled Hezbollah to continue fighting on the ground and firing rockets through the air as they could sustain their fires and maneuver assets without exposing their sustainment assets to the IDF who could target it with air power. While Hezbollah synchronized their sustainment efforts, the IDF struggled to sustain their war effort.

In the early weeks of the war the IDF's fires efforts out stripped its sustainment efforts. On day ten of initial air operations, the IAF had fired almost all of its precision-guided munitions and had to request an emergency resupply from the U.S. As the ground offensive began in the final days of the war, the IDF lacked the ability to resupply ground forces into Lebanon as supply routes were still contested and the IDF lacked protected sustainment capabilities. The inability to sustain combat operations over land, even 10-15km into Lebanon, necessitated allocation of rotary wing and fixed wing aircraft to conduct emergency resupply to ground forces in contact.<sup>42</sup>

## **FORCE READINESS: MEANS, NOT WAYS WAS THE PROBLEM**

Although the preponderance of evidence seems to indicate poor operational synchronization by the IDF as the primary cause for failing to achieve its objectives, others would argue the IDF was so underfunded and undertrained for major combined arms combat

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<sup>42</sup> Matt M. Matthews, *We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War*, The Long War Series (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute (CSI), 2008), 40.

operations that victory was unattainable. From 1982 until 2005, the IDF conducted extensive counter-insurgency operations in Southern Lebanon, the West Bank, and the Gaza strip. The focus of these missions took time and funding away from major combat capabilities and training. During this period, the IDF removed the corps level headquarters from the Army and was in the process of removing the division level headquarters when the war began.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, several battalion commanders had not conducted a night movement with their units, junior officers had gone five years without participating in one combat-training exercise, and tank crews had gone years without qualifying in their tank.<sup>44</sup>

While these training and equipping deficiencies certainly contributed to the IDF's poor performance, the speed with which it reestablished proficiency and successfully conducted major combat operations in Gaza, less than 16-months from the end of the war with Hezbollah, indicate that while these deficiencies may have been broad, they were not very deep.<sup>45</sup> Compressing the time available further, the preliminary findings of the Israeli commission to investigate the failing in the war with Hezbollah did not publish its initial report for six months after the conclusion of the war, and the final report was not published until after the Gaza war began.

The U.S. Army has the capability to conduct maneuver training for three brigade combat teams per month utilizing its three combat training centers around the world. In contrast, the IDF only has one combat training center, limiting it to training only one brigade per month. This throughput problem alone would have precluded the retraining of an entire army of almost 50 brigades—many of which are the reservist. Finally, taken to an extreme, a

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<sup>43</sup> Matt M. Matthews, "Hard Lessons Learned," 25-29.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>45</sup> Lazar Berman, "Beyond the Basics: Looking Beyond the Conventional Wisdom Surrounding the IDF Campaigns against Hizbullah and Hamas." *Small Wars Journal*, April 2011, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/beyond-the-basics>.

perfectly trained and equipped force cannot achieve victory executing a flawed campaign; however, a sound and simple plan can deliver victory even by a minimally capable force.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The conditions and circumstances of the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war make its study valuable for operational level planners and commanders as it demonstrates the complex problem of state-supported hybrid threats. This state-support enables the proliferation of high-end capabilities like armed drones, advanced anti-tank and anti-ship missiles, and sophisticated protection systems. Potential adversaries of the U.S. and its allies will likely continue to increase their ability to protect their combat capabilities by traditional and asymmetric means. This problem set remains in Lebanon and may emerge in Eastern Europe, the broader Middle East, or in the Pacific.

Information warfare is already an important aspect of conflict, but the multiplying effect it has on other functions will continue to grow in an increasingly connected world where everyone has a smart-device connected to the internet. The “info-sphere” is a competitive space, shared by competent adversaries, unencumbered by bureaucracy or norms imposed on state actors. Maintaining peacetime or functional task organizations and attempting to centralize media engagement increases the likelihood an adversary will outmaneuver U.S. operational commanders in the court of public opinion.

To meet the unique challenges posed by increasingly capable hybrid-threats, operational planners and commanders must focus on the synchronization of “multiple punches” from the right mix of domains and functions to achieve victory.

## **LESSONS IDENTIFIED**

Task organizing to a mission or geographic objective versus functional task organization improves an operational commander's ability to be a "multi-hand" puncher. Mission task organizations should allow for air-to-ground or air-to-ship teaming that can overcome the increasingly difficult problem of advanced anti-tank and anti-ship guided missiles. The capabilities this teaming produces holds an enemy at risk from range while a ground or surface combatant closes the distance and can engage with its organic weapon systems. While this is a tactical solution, it can only be made possible with appropriate task organization and command relationships developed at the operational level in planning.

At the operational and tactical level, many units can serve in a range of intelligence, maneuver, or fires roles. To maintain fires-intelligence balance, commanders and planners should adjust task organizations with deliberate thought to allocation and missioning of these multi-role assets.

Commanders and planners cannot take proficiency at joint combined arms maneuver in major combat operations for granted. This skill-set is perishable and units must train and exercise this capability to maintain proficiency. Proficiency in counter-insurgency operations does not equate to proficiency in joint combined arms maneuver for major combat operations. This underscores the importance of continuing to fight to maintain funding for these expensive, but critical training events at combat training centers like the National Training Center (NTC), Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), and Joint Multi-National Readiness Training Center (JMRC).

The strategic narrative developed as part of the operational design for a major operation or campaign needs to be a mechanism for unifying effort. Where a set of targets or an operation

is counter to the narrative, reconciliation or mitigation must occur. This may come in the form of adjusting the target, the operation, or deliberate engagement to explain the deviation from narrative and to nullify enemy attempts to capitalize on the discontinuity.

Commanders should resource units of action with the capabilities to rapidly declassify visual information taken during operations and provide the authority to release the information. Visual information depicting enemy equipment destroyed or enemy attempts to manipulate a scene can then be released widely across multiple media vehicles and have significant effect. This type of information is powerful support for our narrative and for countering the narrative of an adversary.

When missions require operations in densely populated areas, units of actions should be resourced appropriately and given authorities to engage with the civilian population before offensive operations. These engagement teams, nested with fire and ground maneuver operations, should have the capabilities and authorities to call, text, e-mail, or by other means contact people near planned strikes. The timing of the information should be closely coordinated to allow the people to reach safety, while limiting the enemies ability to leverage the information. While the technique may reduce the effectiveness of a strike, the positive effects generated by publicizing this effort can abate the adversary narrative of disproportionality and useful at sustaining legitimacy.

Units must develop and prepare concepts of support that can sustain operational maneuver with contested lines of communication. Operational maneuver cannot be sustained by aerial resupply for any significant length of time due to the scale of the sustainment effort required. Attempts to do so will be an impediment to maintaining momentum. Commanders need to ensure maneuver and fires concepts are sustainable before committing to their execution.



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